



# SUGGESTIONS

FOR THE SPEEDY AND SECURE CONVEYANCE

OF OUR

# REINFORCEMENTS

TO

# CANADA.

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LONDON, 27th December, 1837.

It will be seen that the following letter was written to the then First Lord of the Admiralty immediately after the embarkation of the army for Lisbon, in the winter of 1826. The weather fortunately proved favourable, and the squadron made a very short passage to the Tagus, but if it had been delayed in the Bay of Biscay by the S.W. gales, so frequent at that season of the year, the troops must have suffered severely, as they were much crowded in the men of war, the *Wellesley* of seventy-four guns, having 1,300 men on board, and the other ships being almost equally full. As this is the only occurrence of the sort since the peace, the attention of the Admiralty does not appear to have been since drawn to this subject, and with the exception of two ships of war (the *Jupiter* and *Athol*) fitted for this purpose, the practice of conveying troops to foreign stations in hired merchant vessels, has been persevered in.

At this moment, however, when, according to all present appearances, a great effort must be made early in the spring, to send out a large reinforcement to our army in Canada, and when every practicable precaution should be taken to provide for their speedy and secure conveyance, and for their disembarking in a perfect state of discipline and efficiency, I hope I may be permitted, without presumption, to urge the consideration of this most important subject on our naval administration, and I have thought I might do so with more propriety in now publishing a letter, written some years on a nearly similar occasion; because if the

arguments I then urged should not be thought worthy of attention, I have very little to offer in addition to them.

Those who are acquainted with the coast of North America, and more particularly with the entrance of the St. Laurence, when the navigation first becomes practicable, will, I am sure, agree with me in thinking that too many precautions cannot be taken to secure our troops against the various risks they must encounter from fogs, floating ice, inclement weather, &c. &c. and that their security, health, and discipline, can only be satisfactorily provided for by embarking them in ships of war, carefully fitted and arranged for their conveyance.

I cannot conclude these observations, without very earnestly soliciting the attention of the Ordnance Department, to the suggestions I have offered with respect to the conveyance of stores belonging to that Department; and as it is by no means impossible that piratical privateers may be found cruizing at the mouth of the St. Laurence next summer, I cannot avoid recalling to their recollection, that at one of the most important periods of the war with the United States, and when the armament of our squadron on the Lakes was of such vital consequence to our operations, an Ordnance transport, full of guns and artillery stores, bound to Quebec, having lost its convoy in a fog on the banks of Newfoundland, was captured by an American privateer, and having been carried safely into Boston, enabled the enemy to fit out their squadron with the equipment intended for our own.

W. BOWLES.

TO  
THE VISCOUNT MELVILLE,

*&c. &c. &c.*

LONDON, 16th December, 1826.

MY LORD,

THE permission which your Lordship has occasionally been kind enough to give me, to lay before you suggestions on various subjects connected with the public service, encourages me to take the liberty of offering some observations which, at the present moment, your Lordship may not deem unworthy of consideration, and which, indeed, I have been principally induced to submit in consequence of the recent preparations for the embarkation of troops, which happened to fall under my own observation a few days since at Portsmouth.

It has often been a subject of remark amongst professional men, that complete as our naval preparations are in every other branch of service, and thoroughly provided as we are with every other class of ship which would be required at the commencement of hostilities, yet, that by some oversight, we have been always unprepared with the means of rapidly embarking and transporting to any distant point, such a body of troops, as at the breaking out of a war must

always be urgently required, either for offensive or defensive purposes, without resorting to one of two expedients, both of which are liable to strong objections—namely, the employing our line-of-battle ships on this service, or hiring a large number of merchant ships for transports.

Against the first, may be urged the great hazard we might incur in the face of an active and enterprising enemy, by disarming and disorganizing a most important part of our naval force, at the very moment when every effort should be made to increase and perfect its efficiency. None but professional men can have an idea of the total subversion of all previous order and arrangement which inevitably follows the embarking a large number of troops on board a regular ship of the line—the crew are driven from the deck they usually occupy, to damp and exposed berths on the main deck, where they have no sufficient accommodation either for messing or sleeping; the officers are turned out of their cabins, and the troops themselves being obliged either to sleep in hammocks which they in general do not understand, or to lie on the deck, usually prefer the latter, and if the voyage is long and stormy, or the weather cold and wet, much sickness will be the inevitable consequence both amongst the seamen and soldiers, much relaxation of order and discipline

will follow, and some months may very probably elapse before the former efficiency of the ship is thoroughly restored.

The second mode of conveying Troops in hired merchant ships is equally objectionable—the publicity which is unavoidable when the ships are contracted for, defeats all hope of secrecy as to the force or destination of the expedition, and the innumerable evils which have resulted from the ignorance and misconduct of the masters, the bad sailing and imperfect equipment of the ships, added to their total want of force to resist even a common privateer, all combine to render this the most unsafe manner of conveying troops which can be devised.

A great maritime nation should always be prepared with the means of embarking a considerable force rapidly and secretly, and this can only be done by previous system and arrangement, and by providing such a number of ships of war adapted to this particular purpose as may ensure its accomplishment with the least possible delay. I believe that the experience of the last war fully proved that either the smaller class of ships of the line, or frigates fitted as troop ships were the most economical, as well as the most efficient classes of ships which could be employed for this service. They will carry with ease from 400 to 600 men, to the greatest distance for

which they can be required, and of course more for shorter voyages.

They are respectively navigated by an establishment of officers and men little exceeding in number that of a frigate or a sloop of war. They are fast sailers, very sufficiently armed, and their appearance is so warlike, as to deter an enemy, not very superior in force, from approaching them.

Contrast the situation of a battalion embarked on board a ship of this class with that of another crowded into four or five miserable transports, creeping slowly along, and (if they have the misfortune to lose their convoy) a prey to the first enemy's cruizer they fall in with.

I have been led by a strong feeling of the importance of the subject to dwell longer than I had intended on these preliminary observations, and I will now briefly state the proposition which I take the liberty of submitting for your Lordship's consideration. It is that a certain proportion of troop ships should in future be considered as an indispensable part of the establishment of His Majesty's Navy,—that the whole of these should be perfectly complete, as far as respects their internal fitting, and readiness for service, and that such a proportion of them as would carry five or six thousand men, (about twelve or fourteen) should be kept in commission, with a commander, and a small establishment of officers



on board, so that in the event of any sudden emergency requiring secrecy and dispatch, troops might be silently moved to the coast, and embarked at the shortest notice on board ships in all respects perfectly prepared for their accommodation, and ready to proceed instantly, and without convoy, to their destination,—from fifteen hundred to two thousand seamen are all which would be required to complete these ships, supposing them to be totally unmanned when the order was given, while our regular naval force need be in no way interfered with or disorganized, but might proceed in its equipment with all possible celerity.

I would only beg leave to add one further suggestion. During the late war, ships of war fitted for the purpose were very frequently employed for the conveyance of infantry, but cavalry and artillery continued to be transported as formerly, in hired merchant ships, and the delays and misfortunes which resulted were frequent, and highly injurious to our operations. There can be no difficulty whatever in fitting a proper number of our smaller and half-worn out frigates for these purposes, and then any expedition which sails will be a complete army, fully equipped for immediate service, and divested of every incumbrance which might impede or retard it.

Those officers who remember the delays and disasters of Admiral Christian's ill-fated expeditions will, I am sure, agree with me in asserting, that the misfortunes which befel it could not have occurred to an army embarked on board ships of the description I propose, and I confidently appeal to those who were present at the landing in Egypt to decide whether that brilliant and remarkable operation was not most materially facilitated by the number of ships of war fitted for the conveyance of troops, which accompanied the fleet on that occasion.

If at some future period we commence hostilities, without any previous preparation of this sort, it is easy to foresee the confusion, disappointment, and enormous increase of expense which would immediately ensue.

The reduced state of all our establishments leaves our foreign garrisons on the lowest possible scale, and immediate reinforcements to all our colonies would become matter of the most urgent necessity. Contracts for transports of every description must then be hastily entered into, on such terms as the owners might think fit to impose, and with but little time to examine into the condition and equipment of the vessels so engaged. At such a moment, every advantage would be taken by those interested, of the necessities of Government, and the imperfections

and inefficiency of many of the vessels would only be discovered when it was too late to remedy them.

Two other most serious objections present themselves immediately to the mind of any one who will seriously consider this subject.

The first is the competition for seamen which would inevitably be excited between the transport service and the royal navy, (the former giving much higher wages and offering many superior inducements,) at a moment when every exertion would necessarily be making to prepare a large fleet for sea.

The second, that a very great proportion of the vessels hired would be fitted out in the Thames or in the eastern ports to which they belonged, and that in addition to the delays inseparable from their preparations for this new service, they must be convoyed separately round to the western ports, from which the embarkation of troops would in all probability take place.

It would defy all calculation to predict when a large number of merchant vessels under these circumstances could be assembled at Plymouth or Cork, especially during the winter half-year, while with our regular troop ships no delay whatever need take place, each might proceed separately (and secretly if it was wished) to the appointed destination ; and it is, perhaps, not too

much to say, that the ships conveying reinforcements in this manner to the West Indies, Mediterranean, or North America, might have performed the service they were dispatched on and returned to England, before an unwieldy convoy of hired transports, fitted out under the circumstances I have described, would have cleared the channel.

To bring this system to perfection, it will only be necessary instead of too rapidly breaking up or selling ships which may from age become unequal to the weight of their heavy masts and guns, to give them such a repair as may render them equal to this lighter species of service, and completing all their internal fittings, preserve them in equal readiness with the rest of our navy for immediate service, employing such as it may be deemed advisable to keep in commission on those various services for which a very considerable expense in the hire of transports is now continually incurred.

I have the honor to be,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient Servant,

W. BOWLES.

